

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01
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-----212131Z 129345 /73

R 211443Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4528
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: MOVE WITHIN NRP TO DOWNGRADE YITZHAK RAPHAEL

REF: 76 TEL AVIV 8339 (NOTAL)

1. AT A MEETING OF ITS LEADERSHIP ON JANUARY 19 THE LAMIFNEH
FACTION OF THE NRP, HEADED BY YOSEF BURG, DECIDED OVER-
WHELMINGLY (45-2) TO UNITE WITH THE OTHER NON-RAPHAEL FACTIONS
IN A MOVE TO OUST THE FORMER MINISTER OF RELIGION FROM HIS
PRESENT POSITION OF LEADERSHIP IN THE PARTY. THE PLAN IS TO
RELEGATE RAPHAEL TO A LOWER POSITION IN THE KNESSET LIST THAT
NRP WILL SUBMIT FOR THE MAY ELECTION IN ORDER TO PRECLUDE HIS
BEING A MINISTER IN THE NEXT GOVERNMENT.

2. RAPHAEL'S SUPPORTERS ARE THREATENING TO SPLIT FROM THE
PARTY IF THE MOVE IS SUCCESSFUL. (TWO OTHERS BELONG TO
HIS FACTION: AHARON ABU HATZEIRA AND PINHAS SCHEINMAN.) THEY
CLAIMED THAT FEELERS HAVE BEEN EXTENDED TO THE POALEI
AGUDAT YISRAEL (PAY) FACTION OF THE TORAH FRONT TO UNITE
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WITH THEM. THE PAY CONTROLS TWO OF THE TORAH FRONT'S FIVE
KNESSET SEATS.

3. ALTHOUGH HE IS THE LEADER OF A MAJOR FACTION IN THE
NRP, RAPHAEL IS HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL AMONG MANY PARTY
MEMBERS BECAUSE OF ALLEGATIONS OF WRONG-DOING IN THE PAST.
HE IS PARTICULARLY UNPOPULAR WITH THE YOUTH FACTION HEADED

BY ZEVULUN HAMMER AND YEHUDA BEN-MEIR. BEN-MEIR HAS TOLD US THAT BEYOND GETTING RID OF RAPHAEL, THE FACTION'S HOPE IS TO SET UP A SOLID LEADERSHIP TO REPLACE THE FRAGMENTED, CONFLICTING LEADERSHIP THAT HAS BEEN AT THE HEAD OF THE PARTY SINCE THE DEATH IN 1970 OF OSHE CHAIM SHAPIRA. IF THE MOVE IS SUCCESSFUL, BURG WILL REMAIN AS TITULAR HEAD OF THE PARTY, BUT REAL CONTROL WILL PROBABLY PASS TO HAMMER AND BEN-MEIR. BURG IS NOT EXPECTED TO COMPLETE THE FULL TERM OF THE NEXT KNESSET.

4. BEN-MEIR WAS UNCONCERNED OVER RAPHAEL'S THREAT TO LEAVE THE PARTY, BELIEVING THAT MOST OF THE FACTION WOULD NOT FOLLOW HIM. HE THOUGHT THAT POSSIBLY ONLY SCHEINMAN AMONG THE NRP MKS WOULD LEAVE WITH RAPHAEL. BEN-MEIR DISMISSED THE TALK OF JOINING FORCES WITH RAPHAEL AND STATED THAT RAPHAEL WOULD BE FORTUNATE TO WIN A SEAT FOR HIMSELF IF HE WERE TO RUN INDEPENDENTLY IN THE MAY ELECTION.

5. COMMENT: THE CONFLICT IS OVER MORE THAN JUST THE PERSONALITY OF RAPHAEL. IT INVOLVES THE STRUGGLE OF THE YOUNGER LEADERS TO ACQUIRE GREATER POWER IN THE PARTY. THE OUSTER MOVE IS APPARENTLY ALSO DESIGNED TO GIVE THE PARTY A MORE YOUTHFUL, DYNAMIC IMAGE IN PREPARATION FOR THE KNESSET ELECTION. HOWEVER, IN OUR JUDGEMENT INCREASED INFLUENCE BY HAMMER AND BEN-MEIR IN THE NRP WOULD HARDEN ITS LINE ON THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND WEAKEN THE PARTY'S TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LABOR PARTY.
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